

IN THE CLAIMS:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of the claims in the application:

1. (Currently amended) A method for managing virtual properties that exist solely in a virtual form within a computer network and that have no physical counterparts, comprising:

providing virtual properties configured for use in a computer game operable in a memory of a game server, said virtual properties existing solely in virtual form within a computer network;

assigning ownership of the virtual properties to a plurality of property owners participating in the computer game, said ownership configured through said computer game such that said property owners are permitted to use said virtual properties in said computer game but are not permitted to possess a digital copy of any of said virtual properties;

maintaining an inventory of said virtual properties in a centralized database accessible by said property owners via a network connection;

allowing said property owners to transfer ownership of their respective virtual properties via said network connection; and

maintaining updated records regarding ownership of said virtual properties in said centralized database; and

~~allowing said property owners to use but not possess digital copies of said respective virtual properties within corresponding network spaces, wherein said property owners are prevented from possessing a digital copy of any of said virtual properties and said virtual properties are created for use in a virtual environment to be operated in a memory of a game server according to game rules of the game server.~~

2. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of maintaining an inventory comprises searching for a desired one of said virtual properties within said inventory.

3. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of maintaining updated records regarding ownership comprises associating said virtual properties with respective ones of said property owners.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of allowing said property owners to transfer ownership comprises allowing said property owners to sell their respective virtual properties to buyers.

6. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of allowing said property owners to transfer ownership comprises allowing said property owners to trade their respective virtual properties for other ones of said virtual properties.

7. (Previously presented) The method of Claim 1, wherein said step of allowing said property owners to transfer ownership comprises allowing at least one of said property owners to win one of said virtual properties from another property owner in the course of a game.

8. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of coordinating with partners via said network to identify additional virtual properties not included in said inventory.

9. (Currently amended) A computer-implemented system for managing virtual properties that exist solely in a virtual form within a computer network and that have no physical counterparts, comprising:

a server connected to a network accessible by plural property owner computers;
and

an application program operable with said server to provide the functions of:

providing virtual properties configured for use in a computer game operable in a memory of said server, said virtual properties existing solely in virtual form within a computer network;

assigning ownership of the virtual properties to a plurality of property owners participating in the computer game, said ownership configured through said computer game such that said property owners are permitted to use said virtual properties in said computer game but are not permitted to possess a digital copy of any of said virtual properties;

maintaining an inventory of said virtual properties in a centralized database via said network;

allowing said property owners to transfer ownership of their respective virtual properties via said network connection;

maintaining updated records regarding ownership of said virtual properties in said centralized database; and

allowing said property owners to use but not possess digital copies of said respective virtual properties within corresponding network spaces;

wherein said system is operated such that said property owners are prevented from possessing a digital copy of any of said virtual properties and said virtual properties are created for use in a virtual environment to be operated in a memory of a game server according to game rules of the game server.

10. (Original) The system of Claim 9, further comprising a memory connected to said server and having a database of all said virtual properties maintained by said computer system.

11. (Previously presented) The system of Claim 9, wherein said maintaining an inventory function comprises searching for a desired one of said virtual properties within said inventory.

12. (Previously presented) The system of Claim 9, wherein said maintaining updated records regarding ownership function comprises associating said virtual properties with respective ones of said property owners.

13. (Canceled)

14. (Previously presented) The system of Claim 9, wherein said allowing property owners to transfer ownership function comprises allowing said property owners to sell their respective virtual properties to buyers.

15. (Previously presented) The system of Claim 9, wherein said allowing property owners to transfer ownership function comprises allowing said property owners to trade their respective virtual properties for other ones of said virtual properties.

16. (Previously presented) The system of Claim 9, wherein said allowing property owners to transfer ownership function comprises allowing at least one of said property owners to win one of said virtual properties from another property owner.

17. (Original) The system of Claim 9, further comprising the function of coordinating with partners via said network to identify additional virtual properties not included in said inventory.